

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

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R 171245Z JAN 74

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2449

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

S E C R E T ASMARA 0026

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS(1)

TAGS: PINS, ET

SUBJECT: HIM VISIT TO ERITREA

1. IN RECENT CONVERSATION WITH REAR ADMIRAL DESTA (HIM'S GRANDSON AND PALACE FAVORITE), HE INDICATED THAT FOR FIRST TIME IN REGARD TO HIM'S FORTHCOMING VISIT TO ERITREA, HIM PERSONALLY IS CONCERNED ABOUT PERSONAL SECURITY AND POSSIBILITY OF ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT. FROM CONVERSATION, I SURMISED HIM MAY HAVE RECEIVED PERSONAL THREATS, OR MAY HAVE PREMONITION OF DANGER. I AGREED WITH DESTA THAT THREAT THIS YEAR IS GREATER THAN PREVIOUSLY, AND THAT PARTICULAR SECURITY PRECAUTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN, RECOGNIZING THAT SINGLE SKILLED MARKSMAN PROBABLY COULD SUCCEED EVEN WITH MAXIMUM SECURITY PRECAUTIONS.

2. DESTA SAID NAVY DAYS ARE SCHEDULED AT MASSAWA FEB. 15-17, AND THAT HIM PLANS ARE STILL UNCERTAIN BUT THAT HE PROBABLY WILL VISIT ASMARA FOR NOT MORE THAN FOUR OR FIVE DAYS PRIOR TO FEB. 15. DESTA SAID PLANS FOR CONVENTIONAL ANNUAL VISIT OF SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE OR AFTER NAVY DAYS ARE UNCERTAIN, AND I SURMISED THESE WOULD DEPEND ON SECURITY ASSESSMENT AT TIME.

3. DESTA SAID HE HAD SUGGESTED TO HIM THAT HE SHOULD MAKE VISIT TO KAGNEW STATION WHILE AT ASMARA SINCE THIS IS LAST YEAR OF U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE AND HISTORIC SITUATION. IN SOME PREVIOUS YEARS KAGNEW HAS HOSTED HIM AT LARGE
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LUNCHEON AND PUBLIC CEREMONIES, AND THIS HAS SERVED PERSONAL VANITY OF HIM. I POINTED OUT TO DESTA THAT HE AND HIM MIGHT WANT TO RECONSIDER KAGNEW VISIT FROM POINT OF VIEW OF HIM'S CURRENT POLITICAL INTERESTS. I SAID IF HIM

VISITS KAGNEW, THIS WOULD BE NOTED BY FOREIGN MINISTRIES IN ALL ARAB CAPITALS AND MIGHT REDOUND ADVERSELY ON HIM'S POLITICAL INTERESTS IN PERSPECTIVE OF SOMALI PROBLEM, ARAB-ISRAELI SITUATION, AND GENERAL MID-EAST DEVELOPMENTS. DESTA OBVIOUSLY HAD NOT THOUGHT OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS. I SAID WHILE WE WOULD WELCOME KAGNEW VISIT BY HIM, HE SHOULD CAREFULLY CONSIDER RELATIVE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO IEG FROM POLITICAL ANGLE.

4. WE ALSO WOULD BE TROUBLED WITH NEED FOR HEAVY SECURITY PRECAUTIONS IF HIM VISITS KAGNEW, BUT I DID NOT MENTION THIS TO DESTA.

5. IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WITH ACTING GOVERNOR GENERAL TESFAIOHANNES, I MENTIONED ABOVE TO HIM, EXPLAINING ADDITIONALLY THAT KAGNEW PHASE-DOWN AS HE KNOWS IS GREATLY RESENTED BY POPULATION HERE AND THAT IT WOULD BE POLITICAL BLUNDER FOR EMPEROR TO ASSOCIATE HIMSELF PUBLICLY WITH DYING OPERATION. TESFAIOHANNES SAID DESTA HAD MADE SAME COMMENTS TO HIM (TESFAIOHANNES) AND THAT HE (TESFAIOHANNES) HAD RESPONDED ALONG LINES THAT I FOLLOWED. ACTING GOV GEN SAID HE AGREED ENTIRELY WITH ME THAT VISIT THIS YEAR BY EMPEROR TO KAGNEW WOULD HAVE FAR MORE DISADVANTAGES THAN ADVANTAGES, AND WOULD BE POLITICAL BLUNDER BOTH IN ARAB AND DOMESTIC CONTEXTS.

6. HOWEVER, ACTING GOVERNOR GENERAL (AND DESTA) POINTED OUT FINAL DECISION IN THIS REGARD WILL DEPEND ENTIRELY ON HIM WISHES. IF EMBASSY HAS OPPORTUNITY, SUGGEST EFFORTS IN LOW KEY TO DISCOURAGE HIM VISIT TO KAGNEW THIS YEAR.
RABIDA

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 27 JUL 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 JAN 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974ASMARA00026
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 XGDS(1)
Errors: n/a
Film Number: P750001-1075
From: ASMARA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740175/abbrzbxw.tel
Line Count: 88
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 AUG 2002 by shawdg>; APPROVED <10 DEC 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HIM VISIT TO ERITREA
TAGS: PINS, ET
To: STATE
ADDIS ABABA
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005